

00616

1962/05/08

DECLASSIFIED
TOP SECRET

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Meeting with the President on the Situation in Laos

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY MCCT DATE 5-5-87

RDS ☐ or XDS ☐ EXT. DATE May 8, 1962

TS AUTH. REASON(S)

ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐

DECLASSIFIED ☐ RELEASABLE ☐

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Per

By WES/RE LC Date 4.6.88

Present at the meeting were the President, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric, General Maxwell D. Taylor, General George H. Decker, Messrs Bundy and Forrestal.

The President made the following points:

1. A demarche should be made to Ambassador Dobrynin by Secretary Ball or Secretary Harriman for the purpose of conveying to the Soviet Government the information which we have on the situation in Laos. We should express to Dobrynin our deep concern over the situation, particularly in light of the information suggesting that Souvanna has not been consulted and the absence of evidence that ~~any~~ Souvanna-Kong Le forces had any part in the attack.
2. The President will need a memo: --variant suggested by Mr. Gardner tomorrow morning. (The memorandum of INR. 11:00 a.m. press briefing in the morning.) The President speculated on what line he should take and suggested a statement that we have been advising Phoumi all along that, in the light of the adverse military situation, the longer he delayed negotiations for a coalition government, the more dangerous the situation would become. What has happened is proof of this. The President also observed that he might indicate that if the situation in Laos developed into an obvious take-over, we would have to reconsider our military posture in the area.
3. The President wanted to be certain that Ambassador Brown had clear instructions to reiterate to Phoumi that what had happened at Nam Tha was exactly what we had told him to expect as a result of his intransigence in the negotiations.
4. The President wanted to be sure that our military people in the area took the same line as in (3) above.
5. The President agreed that it was important to improve our sources of information on what was happening in North Laos. Native personnel should be used if possible; but, if necessary, Americans might have to be placed with the retreating FAR forces.

MVForrestal

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FRUS VERSION FOLLOWS

346. Memorandum of Conversation

Washington, May 8, 1962.

SUBJECT

Meeting with the President on the Situation in Laos

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The President made the following points:

1. A démarche should be made to Ambassador Dobrynin by Secretary Ball or Secretary Harriman for the purpose of conveying to the Soviet Government the information which we have on the situation in Laos.¹ We should express to Dobrynin our deep concern over the situation, particularly in light of the information suggesting that Souvanna has not been consulted and that there is no evidence that the Souvanna-Kong Le forces were involved in the hostilities in the northwest.

2. The President will need a memorandum for his press conference tomorrow morning. (The memorandum must be available for the 11:00 a.m. press briefing in the morning.)² The President speculated on what line he should take and suggested a statement that we have been

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Countries Series, Laos: General, 5/1/62-5/9/62. Top Secret. Drafted by Forrestal. The President's appointment book has an entry for a meeting from 5:10 to 6:12 p.m., which includes the participants mentioned by Forrestal, but also includes David Bell, Jerome Wiesner, Glenn Seaborg, Gerald Johnson, Carl Kaysen, Charles Johnson, Harold Brown, and R.E. Hollingsworth. (Ibid., President's Appointment Book)

¹ The Ball-Harriman démarche has not been found.

² The memorandum has not been found, but for text of the reply made by the President at his press conference on May 9, see *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1962*, p. 1070. The President stressed that the longer the negotiations for a coalition continued, the more likelihood there would be incidents like Nam Tha. But in the case of this attack, the President stated, it was a clear breach of the cease-fire. The President expressed hope that the cease-fire could be reestablished and political negotiations resumed.

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3. The President wanted to be certain that Ambassador Brown had clear instructions to reiterate to Phoumi that what had happened at Nam Tha was exactly what we had told him to expect as a result of his intransigence in the negotiations.³

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5. The President agreed that it was important to improve our sources of information on what was happening in North Laos. Native personnel should be used if possible; but, if necessary, Americans might have to be placed with the retreating FAR forces.

³ Brown received instructions in telegram 978 to Vientiane, May 9, "to hammer on the theme that lesson of Nam Tha is that political solution Phoumi's only salvation." (Department of State, Central Files, 751J.00/5-962) Brown reported in telegram 1530 from Vientiane, May 10, that in a call on Phoumi he had stated, inter alia, that the "experience at Nam Tha indicated vividly importance of a speedy political situation in which the force of international agreement could be brought to bear to get Vietminh out of the country." Phoumi nodded. (Ibid., 751J.00/5-1062)